
News Release

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GETS POOR MARKS IN REGIONAL REPORT CARD

Regional Agency Releases Comprehensive Plans To Address Southern California's Major Policy Challenges

LOS ANGELES – Southern California continues to struggle with worsening traffic congestion, poor air quality, weak household income rates and a nearly record low level of available affordable housing according to a State of the Region report released today by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). But the metropolitan planning organization for the six-county, 187-city Southern California region offered up a comprehensive solutions package designed to address many of the congestion, air quality, housing, land use and other challenges highlighted by the regional report card. SCAG's solutions package includes a multi-faceted Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) as well as a Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) which serves as a long-range vision for how Southern California can develop on a more livable, manageable course.

"With the plans being released today, we believe that SCAG has provided the region with a roadmap for turning many of these issues around and creating a vibrant Southern California that we can be proud to leave to our children," said San Bernardino County Supervisor and SCAG President Gary Ovitt.

Southern California's mobility grade increased slightly from last year's "F" to a "D-," reflecting gains that the region made in terms of transit ridership as well as carpool rates. Despite those gains, however, Southern California remained the most congested region when compared to the nation's largest metropolitan areas.

To help address and alleviate Southern California's chronic traffic woes, SCAG released the 2008 draft RTP, which includes hundreds of critically needed improvements to the region's transportation network. After several months of extensive public review, SCAG's Regional Council will adopt a final RTP in the Spring of 2008 for final approval by the federal government. The draft plan's major elements include:

- Numerous projects to increase capacity on various freeways;
- Implementation of new light rail and rapid bus transit corridors, increased capacity of the Metrolink system, and other key improvements to our transit systems;
- A regional, decentralized approach to handling airport passenger and cargo demand as well as airport ground access improvements;
- Development of a high-speed transportation network that connects Southern California's population and employment centers as well as its airports; and
- Capacity enhancements and other improvements to our goods movement road and rail infrastructure using green technologies and systems.

(more)

“The RTP provides Southern California with the opportunity to meet these challenges head-on and develop consensus on solutions that will allow us to develop and maintain a regional transportation system for the 21st Century,” said Ontario City Councilmember and SCAG Transportation Committee Chair Alan Wapner.

The other grades issued by SCAG for Southern California reflected a mixed bag of results for the region:

- **Air Quality (D):** Portions of the region continued to have the highest concentration of particulate matter (PM 2.5) and ozone in the nation. Recent studies have confirmed the severe health impacts from exposure to PM 2.5, including an estimated 5,400 premature deaths, 2,400 hospitalizations, 140,000 cases of asthma and 980,000 lost work days each year.
- **Housing (D):** Compared to the nation’s nine largest metropolitan regions, Southern California had the second lowest homeownership. While 60 percent of the nation’s first-time homebuyers could afford an entry-level home, less than 30 percent in the region could achieve the same. More than 53 percent of owner and renter households had monthly housing costs at or greater than 30 percent of household incomes in 2006, up by 13 and 10 percentage points respectively since 2000.
- **Employment (B):** The region continued its job expansion in 2006 with the lowest unemployment rate since 1980. Total wage and salary jobs increased by 156,000 (2.2 percent) during 2006, the highest since 2000 in terms of number of jobs and growth rate.
- **Income (C):** Among the 17 largest metropolitan regions in the nation, the SCAG region ranked 16th in per capita income in 2005, dropping from the 4th highest in 1970 and 7th highest in 1990. With one in five children below the poverty line, Southern California has the highest poverty rate among the nation’s largest metropolitan areas.
- **Education (D-):** Between 2000 and 2006, the region’s high school dropout rate increased from 12.1 percent to 15.3 percent. In terms of college preparedness, only 36 percent of the region’s high school graduates had taken the necessary courses required for entry to either the UC or California State University systems.
- **Safety (B):** In 2006, there was a small but noticeable decrease in violent crime rates throughout the region. While violent crime rates in Southern California were 40 percent higher than the national average in 2000, the region is now only 10 percent above the national average. There was also a nine percent decline in the number of hate crimes committed throughout the region.

In addition to the State of the Region and RTP, SCAG released a Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP), which provides an all-encompassing vision for how Southern California can balance resource conservation, economic vitality, and quality of life. The RCP – intended to serve as a blueprint to approach growth and infrastructure challenges in an integrated and comprehensive way – includes measurable objectives and targets to measure our progress toward meeting ambitious goals for a sustainable region. The RCP includes numerous strategic findings and recommendations in the areas of Land Use and Housing, Solid Waste, Energy, Air Quality, Open Space and Habitat, the Economy, Water, Transportation, and Security and Emergency Preparedness.

“We will never truly overcome the challenges we face without looking at them comprehensively and understanding how they all relate to one another. The Regional Comprehensive Plan gives us the ability to more fully recognize those relationships and set a more sustainable course,” said Santa Monica Councilmember and Regional Comprehensive Plan Task Force Chair Pam O’Connor.

“As we move towards cleaner and greener solutions, we must focus on creating policies that promote the use of alternative energy sources in the hopes of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and forestalling the onset of climate change,” said Huntington Beach Mayor and Energy and Environment Committee Chair Debbie Cook.